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## GERMAN YEARBOOK OF INTERNATIONAL LAW

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#### The Implementation of Environmental Laws by the European Economic Communities

By Ludwig Krämer

#### I. Introduction

Alexandre Kiss, probably the most renowned European environmental lawyer, concludes his book *Droit international de l'environnement* with the following statement on the implementation of European Economic Communities (EEC) environmental law:

It is encouraging to be able to end a book on international environmental law with a description of a legislative and judicial system which presents so many guarantees of efficiency. Certainly, one might object that Community law forms already no longer a part of international law, since the EEC has set up a quasi-federal system. This objection is not without value; however, is the future of international law not progressing towards federal forms? Environmental law which reveals so many strong and weak points of legal systems, gives, also in this regard, substance for reflection.<sup>1</sup>

Along the same line of thinking, the International Environmental Law Conference (from 12 to 16 August 1990 in The Hague) which was organised by the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) discussed, among other subjects, whether EEC implementation and enforcement procedures could form some sort of a model for the regional or global implementation and enforcement of international conventions.

The importance of EEC implementation rules is also underlined by a number of statements and resolutions which EEC institutions have adopted during the last few years. Thus, the Council Resolution adopting the Community's Fourth Action Programme on the Environment stressed that the Council attaches particular importance to the implementation of Community legislation, and called on the Commission to provide regular reports on the subject so that the Council and the European Parliament could assess the effectiveness of the Community's environmental policy.<sup>2</sup> The European Parliament in turn has adopted a series of Resolutions concerning the implementation of the Community rules on the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Alexandre Kiss, Droit international de l'environnement, Paris 1989, 336.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> European Council, Resolution of 19 October 1987, Official Journal of the European Communities (OJEC) 1987, No C 328/1.

environment.<sup>3</sup> In Dublin on 25-26 June 1990 the European Council stressed the importance of full implementation and enforcement of Community legislation and instructed the Commission to conduct regular reviews and publish detailed reports on its findings.<sup>4</sup> Since environmental problems are of growing concern all over the world and in view of the upcoming United Nations environmental conference in 1992 in Brazil, it seems useful to describe in some detail EEC implementation rules for environmental standards and the way they function in practice.

#### II. The Framework Set by EEC Law

The EEC, a "Regional Economic Integration Organisation" that undertakes to integrate twelve sovereign nation-states into one European Community, has over approximately twenty years of environmental policy adopted some 200 binding pieces of law, in the form of EEC directives, regulations or decisions. These rules of law are adopted by the Council, which acts upon proposals from the Commission and with the participation of the European Parliament. Legal review is exercised by the Court of Justice.

"Community environmental legislation will only be effective if it is fully implemented and enforced by Member States". At present, the overall situation within the EEC is characterised by the late transposal of directives into national law, rather frequent legal deficiencies in national legislative implementation and, in particular, deficiencies in the practical enforcement of rules on implementation of Community law which were fixed at the national level. EEC law is not present in national law; local, regional and national administrations are often not familiar with it. Its relationship with national rules — direct effect doctrine, superiority of Community law, significance of the texts of this or that Community rule — are ignored. In conflicts with economic developments, environmental aspects almost always are given second place. Thus it looks as if all combined rules of Community and national environmental law, adopted over twenty years, have not managed significantly or generally to reverse the trend of the slow but continued degradation of the environment within the EEC.

The key Articles as regards the implementation of EEC environmental measures are Articles 130 r (4) and 155 of the EEC Treaty. Article 130 r (4) states with regard to environmental measures:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Resolution of 10 March 1988 (air and water), OJEC 1988, No C 94/151 and 155; Resolution of 12 October 1988 (nature), OJEC 1988, No C 290/54; Resolution of 13 October 1988 (birds), OJEC 1988, No C 290/137; Resolution of 16 February 1990 (general), OJEC 1990, No C 68/183.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> European Council, Bulletin of the European Communities 6/1990, 18-21.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> European Council (note 4), 19.

Without prejudice to certain measures of a Community nature, the Member States shall finance and implement the other measures.

#### Article 155 states:

In order to ensure the proper functioning and development of the common market, the Commission shall:

— ensure that the provisions of this Treaty and the measures taken by the institutions pursuant thereto are applied; ...

It is generally accepted that Article 155 is not linked to "common market" requirements, but institutes the Commission as guardian of the Treaty in general.

Accordingly, the Commission's work not only prepares environmental legislation or conceives and pursues an EEC environmental policy, but it also is obliged under the Treaty to ensure that all obligations imposed on Member States by Community environmental legislation are honoured.

Thus, Member States not only have to adopt the measures necessary to incorporate Community environmental legislation into their national laws, but also have to apply them fully and correctly over all their territory.

The Court of Justice has ruled that the preservation of the environment is an essential objective in the interest of the Community as a whole.6 The unique feature of environmental legislation, which distinguishes it from Community legislation in other areas, is that it depends almost exclusively on the goodwill of the national administrations to implement it. More specifically, Community legislation on economic affairs, agriculture, competition, transport, or services directly affects the vital interests of key sectors of economic activity in each Member State. Therefore, special interest groups are quick to mobilise all the legal, political or media resources at their disposal to enforce the Community legislation protecting them or combating practices detrimental to them. In contrast to that, the environment belongs to no one in particular ("the Community as a whole") and therefore has no official defender. Virtually nobody can combine the knowhow, means, resources and qualifications needed to protect a biotope, clean up a river or save a forest. Apart from sporadic action by environmental groups, most of whom are poorly equipped, it is left to the authorities to control activities which could potentially damage the environment, and to accept or reject infrastructure projects with a definite environmental impact or to keep track of the movement of dangerous substances or waste. In practice, they are responsible for enforcing the regulations implementing Community legislation and for bringing proceedings against polluters. Administrations alone can collect, organize and, where appropriate, publish data on emissions into the soil, air or water, environmental pollution, environmental hazards, the diversity of flora and fauna or the state of the environment in general.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Court of Justice, Case 240/83, ADBHU, (1985) European Court Reports (ECR) 531; Case 302/86, Commission v. Denmark, (1988) ECR 4607.